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60-2740

18 April 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting of the DCI with Mr. Waldemar Nielsen,
Staff Director of the Sprague Committee

1. Mr. Waldemar Nielsen, Staff Director of the Sprague Committee, accompanied by Col. Coffey and Mr. Gullion, staff members of the Committee, called on the Director in his office at 1500 hours on Friday, April 15th. Mr. Bross was also present.

2. Mr. Nielsen said that the purpose of the visit was to give the Director a general idea of the findings and recommendations of the subcommittee of the Sprague Committee concerned with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. He said that the report of the subcommittee was still tentative and subject to modification but that in all probability it would follow the general lines of the draft which he had brought with him. Mr. Nielsen then read the draft conclusions and recommendations and later gave copies to the Director and Mr. Bross for reference during the discussion which followed.

3. The report may be summarized briefly as follows:

a. The broadcasting activities of RFE and RL have a good record of achievement and should be continued.

b. The Government should continue to support them as well as VOA, as these two media serve different purposes. RFE and RL speak as unofficial and unattributable voices of the American people, as distinguished from VOA which is the official spokesman of the Government. Another distinguishing feature is that VOA is regarded as an exponent of purely American views whereas RFE and RL are more international in character and are identified with European sponsorship.

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c. The activities of both RFE and RL should be reviewed and assessed in order to ensure their consistency with political and technical developments. The programs of RFE and RL have been slow to adjust to changing conditions and have failed sometimes to make necessary accommodations to changes in broadcasting policy. This in part reflects divergencies of opinion between State and CIA concerning the role of broadcasting and also regarding the significance of particular events and developments.

d. Under appropriate circumstances, VOA might sometimes use the facilities of RFE and RL for broadcasting purposes.

e. In order to ensure maximum coordination, the use of the Radio Broadcasting Policy Committee should be expanded and subcommittees of this committee should be established to deal on a continuing basis with geographical and functional problems. USIA should be consulted more often about policy matters and about the line to be followed by the two unofficial radios. A greater degree of control should be developed over the activities of RFE comparable to that exercised in connection with Radio Liberty.

f. United States Missions and Consulates in areas concerned with the broadcasts of the two radios should be consulted to a greater degree than has been the case in the past about the line adopted in programs undertaken by the two radios.

g. 40 percent of the total radio effort of United States facilities is aimed against the Soviet bloc and a review looking to a possible reallocation of effort should be conducted of (a) the total U.S. radio program, (b) the total U.S. information program and (c) the total covert program.

h. Consideration should be given to the initiation of radio broadcasts to Communist China.

4. Opening the discussion, the Director indicated his desire for the closest possible collaboration with the State Department regarding the activities of RFE and RL. He said that he was

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troubled by the critical views which appeared to exist in the State Department which were not always very clearly communicated. He said that he had discussed RFE at considerable length with Ambassador Beam and that these discussions had resulted in the existing directive governing the activities of RFE. The Director said that he would continue to welcome the fullest possible expression of views from the State Department and from any Embassies concerned with our broadcasts. (At a later point in the discussion with particular reference to the Committee's recommendation that Consulates and Missions be permitted to comment on programs prior to their release, the Director pointed out certain difficulties. Where programs deal with general or cultural subjects he saw no reason why the Embassies and Consulates should not be consulted in advance. On the other hand, some of the programs of both radios concern topical subjects or news and their value depends largely on timeliness. Where the impact of the program depends on its ability to respond immediately to local situations or news developments there is very often not sufficient time to consult diplomatic establishments prior to a particular broadcast.)

5. The Director questioned the validity of the statement that the unofficial radios had a European coloration as opposed to the purely American character of VOA. Col. Coffey and Mr. Cullion said that they had received this impression during the course of their conversation with Mr. Alexander. They had apparently received the impression from him that the European associations of RFE and RL were considered an advantage vis-a-vis their respective audiences. The Director was not entirely in agreement with this statement, pointing out that the audiences of RFE, for example the Poles, were very attracted to RFE by its American origin. The Director did stress the advantage of the new European Advisory Committee in associating Europeans with the radios.

6. As regards the question of policy, the Director reiterated several times his strong opinion that State must be responsible for the formulation of policy which would be strictly adhered to by this Agency and its various instrumentalities. He said that he thought that more could be done by Embassies in Iron Curtain countries and by our own representatives in these Embassies to monitor the signal and content of RFE and RL broadcasts. The discussion turned to the question of the attitude of the State Department towards the radios. Mr. Cullion said that he was surprised by the depth and

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breadth of State Department hostility. He was the more surprised at this attitude after having read the favorable comments expressed on behalf of the State Department in Andrew Berding's letter to the May Committee. Mr. Gullion thought that State Department opposition to the radios was based on a number of factors. Not the least of these is the skepticism of the Foreign Service towards the effectiveness of broadcasting generally. As regards RFE and RL the Foreign Service on the whole feels that at best they are ineffective and at worst counter-productive. They apparently feel that the positive dangers of the unofficial radios exceed those inherent in VOA, presumably because they feel that the former are less amenable to control than the latter. The Director again stated his very firm intention to ensure that RFE subscribes to policy as enunciated by the State Department. He said that if the State Department really felt that RFE was counter-productive he would close it down tomorrow. On the other hand, he felt that any precipitate action to terminate the radios would probably be undesirable and that changes, if any, should be undertaken gradually.

7. There was some discussion of the adequacy of policy controls over RFE. The recent directive provides that commentary on internal matters should be limited to 10 percent. Mr. Gullion and Col. Coffey said that there was considerable evidence of concern in the State Department as to whether this directive was being strictly adhered to. It appears, however, that adherence turns somewhat on a question of interpretation. The question is 10 percent of what? -- whether of total broadcast time or whether 10 percent of news or of non-musical programs or what.

8. The Director expressed specific concern about the language of the report which indicated possible differences of opinion with respect to policy matters as between the State Department and CIA (See 13.c. above). It was agreed that any inference to this effect would be eliminated from the report. The subcommittee's feeling was not that there was disagreement with respect to policy or unwillingness on the part of the Agency to conform to or implement this policy. They did feel that the controls over particular broadcasts of RFE necessary to ensure total consistency with policy left something to be desired. They also felt that the influence of emigre editors and programmers, etc. in RFE continues to be excessive. They did not feel that this criticism applied particularly to Radio Liberty.

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9. The Director, with further reference to the alleged hostility of the State Department towards the radios, recapitulated the history of the two radios, stressing the fact that the radios were originally created with the full and active support and, indeed, at the solicitation of ranking members of the State Department, particularly George Kennan. The subcommittee did not appear to have been fully aware of this history. Mr. Gullion attributed to Foy Kohler the statement that were it starting from scratch, he would not recommend creation of a radio at this time. On the other hand, Kohler is not prepared to recommend the dismemberment of the radios now that they are in being.

10. With respect to the recommendation that RFE and RL allocate broadcasting time to VOA, the Director indicated that this was a purely technical problem and that he would have no objection to the proposal in principle if legal, administrative and other obstacles could be overcome. Everybody agreed that such obstacles probably existed.

11. Mr. Gullion raised the question of the adequacy of pre-broadcast censorship of scripts. It was our impression that the scripts are presently subjected to advance monitoring as well as review. Mr. Gullion thought that this was true on only some occasions. It was agreed that CIA would look into this problem.

12. Mr. Nielsen at one point stated that in effect what they are recommending is the continuation of the two radios for the time being with minor modifications and with improved controls until developments permit a basic decision as to the long term futures of the projects. He expressed the thought that the future might very well indicate some change in the present emphasis of effort and allocation of media involved in propaganda activity against Soviet Russia. He pointed out that VOA is now devoting only approximately two million of its over-all budget (16 million?) to broadcasting against Soviet Russia. Mr. Nielsen suggested that in time the rather large discrepancies between official and unofficial broadcasts reflected in the budgets of the two agencies might call for some readjustments.

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13. In conclusion, the Director stated that future developments might well suggest or require change in the scope and activities of the two radios. He felt that until the significance of developments in Soviet Russia is considerably clearer than it is today, a substantial change in the U.S. propaganda effort against the Soviets would be a mistake and that the complete liquidation of any of our major resources or facilities would be a great mistake. The Committee expressed complete agreement with this view. The Director indicated that at the meeting of the Committee on April 25th, he might have a rather radical proposal to make. Asked whether he was in a position to indicate the nature of this proposal, the Director said that he had yet to put it on paper and examine its implications. Therefore, he preferred not to say any more about it at this time.

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